



**National Ambulance  
BME Forum**

# Ramadan Guidance

**Supporting staff and providing care  
to our communities during Ramadan**

Working to improve the  
experience of Black and Minority  
Ethnic Staff and communities

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Revised for April 2020

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# Welcome!



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Our Ramadan guidance was the first guidance we launched in 2019 following on from the network relaunch in 2018.

Race and faith are often closely linked and can play an important part in the lives of many of our diverse communities.

Festivals like Ramadan, as well as Easter, Yom Kippur, Vaisakhi, Diwali and the other religious events give us an opportunity not just to support those who observe them, but also to learn and understand more about the people we work with and the communities we serve.

April 2020 seems to be especially symbolic for many communities with the month marking not just Ramadan, but with Easter, Vaisakhi, and Passover as well. All of these festivals traditionally bring together families and provide community cohesion.

In light of the current Corona Virus Pandemic they will be take on a very different feel this year for Muslim staff who are observing the Ramadan fast . There is a possibility for increased negative impact on staff wellbeing as a result of a lack of access to prayer facilities, quiet rooms and multi faith rooms in addition to the increased level of pressure on all staff across the NHS.



# Ramadan: Frequently asked questions



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## What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic lunar year. It is a month of fasting, a duty upon all adults and healthy Muslims. In the UK, Ramadan will start on **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2020**, but is dependant on the sighting of the new moon.

## What is a fast?

The fast lasts between dawn and sunset. It is a total fast with complete abstinence from all food and drink.

## What happens when Ramadan ends?

The end of Ramadan, which lasts for 29 or 30 days, is marked by the festival of Eid-UI-Fitr for which some Muslim staff members will wish to take leave from work. The actual day that Eid falls on will depend on when the new moon is sighted and for this reason it might not be possible for the staff member to be very specific about the day they would like to be away from work and therefore some flexibility may be necessary.

## Is everyone required to fast?

Some people are exempt from fasting, these include:

- pregnant and menstruating women
- lactating women who have concerns about their own or their child's health.
- children
- the elderly and infirm
- those who are ill
- individuals travelling long distances.

**In many cases, exempted persons and other people who may be vulnerable, such as people with diabetes and older people will want to fast. It is a very special time where Muslims will want to be a part of this time of reflection and consideration.**



# What do observers do?



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With over 1.8 billion Muslims across the world, not everyone observes Ramadan in exactly the same way, but there are some commonalities. Although most observant Muslims fast for Ramadan, it's important to not make assumptions that every Muslim you meet has the same methods, traditions, and attitudes towards fasting. For most, Ramadan is more about prayer, reading the Qur'an, and performing acts of charity than merely about forgoing food and drink. Key observances include;

**Refrain from eating or drinking (even water) daily from sunrise to sunset**, (approximately 15.5 hours a day). Many Muslims will consider it an obligatory duty to fast from dawn to dusk. Through not eating, people are encouraged to think of the less fortunate who are often without food.

**Wake up early for "Suhoor"** to eat a power meal before fasting begins at sunrise (around 3.00am).

**Celebrate "Iftar", the breaking of the fast** at sundown. This is often celebrated by gathering with family, friends and neighbours for large feasts and will be impacted by restrictions as a result of the current pandemic.

**Give** money, food and time **to charity** and people in need.

**Reflect**, pray, and read verses of the Quran, and under usual circumstances visit the mosque to worship as a community.



# Ramadan: Impact of Covid19



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## Supporting patients communication needs

Good communication with diverse patient groups and use of appropriate interpretation tools e.g. LanguageLine is more important than ever now when communication is difficult by the necessary use of PPE.

The need for social distancing may also mean that family members who normally support communication where English is not a first language are now unable to do so.

## Can staff with confirmed / suspected Covid19 fast?

Staff need to be aware of the health issues related to fasting, so that they are able to make more informed choices, minimise complications and maximise the benefit of their fast as well as operational effectiveness. Those who are symptomatic or confirmed as having COVID-19 won't be required to fast as fasting is not compulsory, or advisable for anyone who is ill or has a medical condition.

## Impact of wearing PPE on staff observing Ramadan

The need to wear increased levels of PPE when attending patients will cause all staff to feel higher levels of exertion, heat and discomfort, and as such there is an increased risk of dehydration as a result. Staff who are fasting as well as their Managers will need to be aware of the additional risk to their wellbeing.

For many Muslims, Ramadan also provides a sense of community and wellbeing. Current social distancing measures and closures of mosques mean this will be very restricted and will add to anxiety and stress that many are already feeling as a result of the pandemic.





# Meeting peoples' needs



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First and foremost, Ramadan, is a special time for Muslims, and the appropriate way to express best wishes to a Muslim colleague or patient for Ramadan is to say: “**Ramadan Mubarak**”. Similarly, you can express best wishes to a Muslim colleague or Patient for Eid by saying “**Eid Mubarak**”

Being equipped with the necessary information in relation to Ramadan supports clinicians to provide the best possible care that considers a persons specific needs, as well as allowing patients to make informed choices.

If you need to understand the specific needs of a patient in relation to Ramadan, ask them. If there is a communication barrier please use telephone interpreting services and any other available communication tools to aid communication.

Knowing this information will allow clinicians to consider the particular needs of patients when providing medical interventions, care and advice.

When approaching the issue with Muslim patients, it is important for healthcare professionals to provide an acknowledgement to the fast e.g.

- *“I understand that it is Ramadan, are you fasting at the moment?”*
- *“I would like to be able to... I believe this may/may not break your fast (where applicable)... are you comfortable with this?”*

Where Muslim patients refuse treatment, even though it may not break the fast, the patient's choice should be respected and advice should be offered on medical grounds.



# Impact of fasting on clinical assessments



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## The fast will break when:

- Eating or drinking intentionally
- Taking oral medication
- Providing nourishing medication (also by intramuscular or intravenous injections)
- Smoking

## The fast will not break when:

*\*Caution this will be open to the patient's interpretation.*

- Administering injections (intravenous, intramuscular and subcutaneous)
- Taking bloods (thumb pricks or intravenous)
- Using puffers and inhalers or eye and ear drops
- Eating or drinking unintentionally

## Clinical interventions that would break the fast include:

*\*this list is not exhaustive*

- Using Aspirin
- Glucagon (IM)
- Glucose drip (IV)
- Glucose drinks

## Clinical interventions would not break the fast include:

*\*this list is not exhaustive*

- GTN (Glyceryl Tri Nitrate)
- Treating wounds
- Rectal Diazepam
- Nebulisers and Oxygen
- Ventolin sprays / Salbutamol
- Saline infusion (IV)
- Morphine (IV)
- Diazepam
- Adrenaline
- Penicillin (IV)

# Working and Ramadan

Working has a great importance and value in Islam. The importance of earning a living through lawful means is emphasised in the Qur'an.

## Should I tell my colleagues that I am fasting?

It is better to let your colleagues and managers know that you are fasting. They may be wondering why you aren't eating and not your usual self.

By discussing it with your manager, you may find that they are willing to consider a flexible working arrangement such as an early start, early finish, a shorter lunch or something else which will help you during the month of Ramadan.

## How do I manage fasting at work?

- **Plan your leave wisely:** Whether it's to book time off during Ramadan or for Eid-ul-fitr, planning your leave early is important.
- **Eating well:** Eating healthily and drinking lots of water [between sunset and sunrise] will help boost your energy.
- **Meal breaks:** If you are scheduled a meal break and you are fasting, consider alternatives to eating - try and find a quiet space for a power nap, or consider going for a walk.



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*Eating well during Ramadan is really important, so why not give this simple Suhoor Date and Banana smoothie a go!*

### Ingredients

- 1 banana
- 5 medjool dates pitted
- 1 glass of milk (you could mix it with water to make it less creamy)
- 2 teaspoons of cocoa powder
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon (optional)

Simply add all ingredients to a blender, and blend away until smooth and creamy!





# Guidance for managers



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Managers need to be aware of the importance of 'being part of' Ramadan. This could lead to placing a different demand on Trust services in areas where there are high density ethnic minority Muslim populations.

Managers also need to consider the impact of Ramadan on staffing and exploring ways to accommodate Muslim staff needs. Consideration should be given to allowing breaks at different times of day to support Muslim staff.



## **Other considerations Managers should take into account:**

- Be aware of the increased risk to wellbeing of operational staff who are fasting due to the need to wear increased PPE.
- Consider sensitively any requests for annual leave or shift swaps for Eid-ul-Fitr
- People may be more tired and lack energy due to the lack of food and water, and broken sleep patterns. Consider agile/ flexible working or changing shift rotas to accommodate tiredness.
- Support people to break the fast where possible at the required time.
- Allowing time off to pray, especially at sunset.
- Allowing meal breaks at different times, if possible - for example lunch break at dusk, initially to coincide with breaking the fast.
- Consider providing a designated space for prayer and reflection, during the current pandemic this could be even more important to staff wellbeing.
- Be aware that due to different schools of thought you may also find that Muslim staff may not all begin fasting or celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr on the same day.



# Balancing religious identity and operational demand



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All requests based on religious identity and practice should be considered and balanced against operational need.

As a supportive employer and proactive service provider, it is good practice to accommodate these requests wherever possible. Accommodating religious beliefs and practices does not mean allowing extra time off – it is about being flexible about employees' existing holiday entitlement, working patterns or break periods.

This year with Covid19 pandemic there are additional challenges which both staff and managers need to take into consideration and acknowledge. For some staff, it may have included the difficult decision to remove facial hair which holds particular significance for Muslim men in order to protect themselves, their patients and their families and comply with personal protection equipment requirements. For others, it may be the difficulty in providing time to observe their faith in ways that they may have been supported previously but is more challenging in the current climate.





The National Ambulance BME Forum wishes everyone celebrating  
***Ramadan Mubarak***

